

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS

(Philippians 1:12-18)

Series: "Philippians: The Joyful Letter" (Part 6)

...One of the greatest military men of all times was Stonewall Jackson, who was General Lee's right hand man. This godly man, fighting on the side of the Confederates never lost a single battle. His warring cry was always "Advance!" "Advance against the enemy." Never be defensive, rather always be on the offensive. Press forward.

...The Apostle Paul had been incarcerated for 4 years, awaiting his trial before Caesar in Rome. This certainly was not the plan he had for his life and work. He had hoped to go to Spain and Rome as a preacher, but now he went as a prisoner. What happened? What was God up to? His friends were worried about him and the work.

...Paul wrote to tell his friends at Philippi that through all of his trials, God's work of the Gospel was advancing in ways unimaginable. Christ was being proclaimed far and wide in Rome, due to his suffering and pain.

TWO TOOLS FOUND IN GOD'S TOOLBOX MYSTERIOUSLY USED BY HIM TO ADVANCE THE GOSPEL THROUGH US.

...Solomon wrote: "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." (Proverbs 16:9)

I. Chains: God Often Advances The Gospel Through Our Suffering. (1:12-14)

...Though he would never have chosen this way, Paul's circumstances advanced the Gospel.

- A. Paul, after greeting his dear friends in Philippi, finally gets to tell of his situation. He had heard they were worried about him and the Gospel, thinking all was nearly lost. "The plans of..."
1. So he assures them that his circumstances have worked out for the advancement of the Gospel. "Who knew this would be God's wonderful plan?" Only: "Plan A."
 2. The word "advance" means to make progress in the face of opposition. God was at work through his weakness, while being a prisoner in Rome.
- B. Paul told of two specific ways that the Lord's work had progressed through his suffering:
1. Through his "chains" Paul had gained access to lost men.
...It was the Roman custom to bind a prisoner at the wrist to a Praetorium Guard and change the guard every 6 hours. Imagine that! The palace guards, Caesar's...
...Also his trial became well known among the Caesar's court, as his case was very important as the Roman government was considering this new Christian sect.
...It became known that his imprisonment was for Christ, not crime, and his relationship to the Savior. The result of this, many came to Christ as Savior and Lord.
...Had Paul come to Rome in his own way, this would never have happened.
 2. Through Paul's "chain of suffering" many believers took fresh courage to proclaim Christ. (v.14)
Seeing Paul's faith and determination the brothers were emboldened.
...They spoke, and keep on speaking without fear the things of Christ.
...Paul's joyful attitude encouraged others, and the work advanced.

(John Bunyan, Fanny Crosby, Mrs. Charles Spurgeon show us how suffering in "chains" can really be God's method of building His church.) Any of our confinements, can be considered as "Chains."

(Has suffering ever brought you closer to God? If it has, then you are well on your way to being a great blessing to God's people and to tasting the joy of seeing the Gospel spread through suffering.)

II. Critics: God's Work Advances Even When We Suffer The Words Of Others. (v.15-18)

...It is hard to imagine, but Paul had his critics who spoke against him, desiring his hurt.

- A. Paul tells that not all Christians in Rome were responding to his imprisonment with the highest of motives. Some were preaching Christ, "Out of envy and rivalry."

1. These were pastors in Rome. Theirs was not a doctrinal problem, but a personal one. ...They were preaching Christ. This is the Gospel. They were not heretics.
2. Perhaps they were petty men serving as pastors who now felt overshadowed with Paul's presence in Rome and all the talk of his trial around town. (???) Jealously.
- B. Paul told that there were "others" who loved and supported him and knew all of this was happening for "The defense of the Gospel." These brothers had the "big view" as to what God was doing through Paul's painful circumstances. Paul: "I am put here..." (No Accident)
- C. Through all of this Paul rejoiced that Christ was being proclaimed through his imprisonment. ...Rather than focusing upon his suffering circumstances, he focused upon Jesus and His Gospel.

SO WHAT? WHAT DIFFERENCE SHOULD THIS MAKE IN YOUR LIFE?

1. Consider the glory and greatness of our God who in His mysterious ways planned to do the greatest work ever done by sending a baby, His Son, who would one day provide in His own death our atonement. When you think about God's plan of redemption, and the importance of this work on our behalf, you might have thought He would have sent in "The Marines," or the Navy...or Airborne. But no, to His glory and power, His plan was to send His Son as a helpless baby. What mystery, what wonder, and what majesty!
2. Never forget that if you know Jesus as Savior and Lord it is He who orders the steps of your life. Make your plan, of course, then lay it at His feet asking for His direction, then move forward and He will lead you day by day in this journey for His glory. It is His unseen hand that guides us through life to accomplish His will and work.
3. Suffering, confinement, and pain are hard to take, but is a reality in our fallen broken world. If you are now suffering look up and ask the Lord to show you what His purpose is in it. What is God trying to accomplish through your circumstances? Is He purifying you? Is He allowing you to be an avenue of blessing to others? Fix your eyes and thoughts upon Him and He will use your pain for the advancement of His work through you.
4. Perhaps you are here today and still need to discover God's love for you found in Jesus Christ. This morning Jesus is calling you to put your faith in Him, to receive Him as your Savior and Lord. Will you agree with God that you have sinned, turn from them, and run to Him? God is calling you. Come to the Cross today and be saved.

Life Group Discussion Questions:

1. As Paul's plan for his life was dramatically altered by the Lord, can you share with us a time or two when your 'plan' went completely out the window, as God changed everything? Can you tell of your emotions and thoughts during such days? Today have you been able to make sense of what God did or allowed? Can you share what He was doing?
2. Have you experienced suffering for Jesus? In big ways and small ways, we as believers are called to suffer for Him. How have you suffered for Jesus? Do you think the days ahead will be easier for us as Christians? What might we expect?
3. How do you respond to those who hurt you through their lips? Hurtful words wound us and often stay with us a long time. What can and should we do when we receive painful words? How is it possible at such times to keep our eyes and thoughts fixed on Jesus? If so, how do we do this?
4. Like Paul, what things can you do in your life to intentionally advance the Gospel? Any thoughts?